

Programs for Young Children

Philosophy and Guiding Principles

Four-year-old and five-year-old kindergarten plays a unique role in a child's educational experience, serving as a transition from home or pre-school experiences to formal schooling. The kindergarten experience is critical in establishing **positive feelings** about coming to school and the child's view of self as a **capable learner**. It is important that, in a school setting, children's natural dispositions for learning are nurtured and built upon and that the foundations of **family learning and involvement** in the children's education are supported. Through participation in 5k programs, children increase their desire to learn, to think for themselves, to solve problems, and to express themselves through the languages of words, mathematics, music and the arts. They learn to live and work with others.

Early childhood educators know that programs for young children should support the development of the **whole child**. Good 5K programs provide **integrated experiences** that address children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional needs. Knowledge of the **typical development** of children within the age span of the students served by the program provides a framework from which teachers prepare the learning environment and plan appropriate experiences.

Instructional practices should be appropriate to **the developmental stages** of the children. Young children learn as the result of the interaction between their thoughts and experience with materials, ideas, and people. Children learn best when curricular content is meaningful and utilizes real situations from familiar environments. The overlapping of subject matter, or the **integration of content**, increases the likelihood that children will make connections, find the information meaningful and apply it in real-life contexts.

Learning results from children's **active involvement** with their surroundings. A **learning center organization** reflects this understanding and is used to provide materials and spaces that engage children's minds. The classroom provides a **child-centered, multi-sensory** environment where children can make choices, be self-directed, and develop concepts and skills within a well planned, stimulating atmosphere. Daily plans reflect a **balance** between teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities. Attention is given to children's learning styles and preferences. Students with identified disabilities or needs receive special assistance. Because each child is unique in terms of maturity, personality, strengths, and experiential background, activities should be open-ended and challenging to best support each child's development and growing ability to meet learner standards in all areas.

There is an important interrelationship of all aspects of each child's development with physical, social, psychomotor, and cognitive growth clearly interwoven. Research by Bloom, Hunt, Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardner, Eisner, Katz, Clay and others suggests that the early years are crucial for the development of intelligence. In the development of thinking skills, strategies, and concepts, it is essential that children learn in a

stimulating and responsive environment with which they are encouraged to interact. The child's degree of success in using thinking skills and strategies to generalize in a variety of situations is largely determined while the child is very young and is based on the quality of the child's experiences during that time. Strong family involvement based on mutual respect and open communication between the home and school is critical in maximizing children's growth and development in all areas.

In conclusion, early childhood educators in South Carolina are committed to teaching in ways that are consistent with the needs of young children as learners. We believe that learning environments and instructional strategies should consistently provide age, individual, and culturally appropriate experiences. The requirement of certification in early childhood education helps to ensure that teachers are properly prepared to provide quality programs for young children across the state. It is vital that those who work with young children have an in-depth understanding of the foundations of early childhood curriculum and instruction and the ability to apply their knowledge to provide appropriate, mind-engaging daily experiences. In so doing, children can construct and share knowledge within the context of a joyful, respectful, and intellectually engaging instructional program.